

## WHERE WE STAND IN VIETNAM

### I

Few subjects today generate as much emotional heat as the complex struggle for freedom now being waged in Vietnam. The issues involved are poorly understood by many critics of your government's policy. These issues cannot really be understood or intelligently discussed without a clear appreciation of the struggle's complex history. To see clearly where we stand today, we must first go back to the beginning.

The origins of this war are rooted in the political ambitions of the leaders of the Vietnamese Communist Party, now known as the Lao Dong. Ever since the Party was founded in 1930, its leaders have had one unwavering and overriding objective: the acquisition of political control over all of Vietnam. This primary objective has also had what might be called a negative corollary to which the Lao Dong's leaders have also always subscribed: that by whatever means necessary the Party must prevent the evolution of an independent Vietnamese state structure not under Communist Party control. The insurgency which began in 1957 and has evolved into the war we are fighting today was deliberately started by the Communist Party. The Party opted for war because it recognized that the hopeful achievements of the Diem government's early years, if not checked,

could lead to the evolution of a viable non-Communist state. This was a development the Party had to smash before it became an insuperable obstacle to the achievement of the Party's primary objective.

In the late 1950s, South Vietnam was beset with basic social and political problems. Its people were inheritors of all the evils of divisive colonial rule and stood dazed in the aftermath of almost two decades of anarchy and chaos. Despite its many promising aspects, the Diem government even in its early years was far from perfect and made many mistakes. The Vietnamese Communist Party did everything it could to capitalize on the errors of the Saigon Government, to exacerbate the basic problems and difficulties of the South Vietnamese people and, wherever possible, to prevent the Saigon Government from addressing itself effectively to their solution. The Party was interested only in its own political aggrandizement, not in the welfare of the people of Vietnam or the misery inflicted on them in the Party's ruthless quest for power.

It is, of course, true that even had there never been a Vietnamese Communist Party there would have been unrest in South Vietnam generating political turbulence which might have found some expression in armed protest. The fact remains, however, that there would never have been a war of the kind we are waging today with all its attendant human misery had the Vietnamese Communist Party not adopted a deliberate policy of

attempting to dictate South Vietnam's political future by force of arms. The Party did not create many of the basic maladjustments and stresses in South Vietnamese society and in the Vietnamese body politic, but it systematically exploited these basic evils for its own political advantage and did everything possible to prevent non-Communist nationalists from resolving them. The Party made the deliberate political decision to start the war and, from the moment of its inception, has directed the war from Party headquarters in Hanoi.

## II

The strategy employed by the Communist Party in the course of its attempt to dictate South Vietnam's future by force of arms has gone through several clearly defined stages. From 1957 to 1959 the Party relied primarily on subversion and terrorism largely carried out by persons native to South Vietnam whose actions were coordinated through Party channels, under Hanoi's direction. This campaign of terrorism and subversion took a heavy toll, particularly those components of the Diem government who were trying hardest to better the lot of the South Vietnamese people and whose activities, consequently, were regarded by the Communist Party as a great political threat: the schoolteachers, the village nurses and even members of the mosquito control teams attempting to eliminate the age-old scourge

of malaria from rural South Vietnam. Such persons were marked early on for intimidation and, where that did not work, brutal assassination.

This early campaign of terrorism and subversion was designed to recreate the anarchy and chaos of previous years and block further political progress. This campaign complicated the positive efforts of the Diem government but did not prove sufficient to topple that government. In 1959, therefore, the Communist Party decided that something more was required, and escalated the struggle to a new stage: the national liberation war. Ever larger numbers of Vietnamese of southern origin resident in North Vietnam were organized, trained and dispatched back to the south to develop, expand and direct the Viet Cong military and political apparatus. This phase of steadily intensifying struggle waged under Hanoi's direction primarily with persons originally native to South Vietnam lasted from 1959 until 1964.

The post-1959 Hanoi escalation naturally prompted a substantial increase in our support and advisory contribution to our beleaguered South Vietnamese allies in their double task of turning a shattered society into a free nation while simultaneously coping with steadily mounting aggression directed and supported from Hanoi. When President Kennedy took office, we had about 800 military personnel in South Vietnam. By the end of 1963,

this number had been increased more than twentyfold to just over 16,000. By the end of 1963, however, Hanoi had sent south over 31,000 disciplined cadre that we know of. These were not advisors. Instead, they were the organizers, directors and field commanders of the mounting Communist assault on the freedom of South Vietnam.

In the late spring or early summer of 1964, the Party Politburo in Hanoi reviewed the bidding once again and decided to take another step of escalation. In the aftermath of Diem's overthrow, non-Communist elements in South Vietnam were trying to create a political structure responsive to their needs and the realities of the crisis situation. There were no traditional or institutional precedents to guide them in this difficult task, which the Communists were doing everything possible to complicate. The not always peaceful competition of various groups engaged in testing their relative political strengths, striking political balances, and forging new institutions in the midst of a war produced a good deal of turbulence. In this unsettled political atmosphere Hanoi thought it saw a golden opportunity to deliver a coup de grace to its non-Communist nationalist opponents in the south by injecting line elements of the North Vietnamese Army into the struggle in numbers sufficient to collapse South Vietnamese resistance to Hanoi's rule.

The first such elements began moving through Laos in the fall of 1964 and began to take their places on the southern battlefield late that year

and early in 1965. This 1964 Party policy decision initiated what has become a progressive and ever more blatant North Vietnamization of the military aspect of the struggle. Today there are almost twice as many North Vietnamese troops fighting in South Vietnam as there are actual (i. e., southern) "VC" troops, and many units still called "VC" because of their historical origin are now largely if not predominantly made up of North Vietnamese soldiers.

The dates in question here are very important. Given the lead time necessary to implement such a decision, from the fact that line elements of the North Vietnamese Army were moving through Laos in the fall of 1964, we can be certain that the policy decision to dispatch them could not have been taken later than the early summer of 1964. That decision, my friends, was clearly made long before the Tonkin Gulf incidents of the summer of 1964, many months before the present bombing campaign began in February 1965, close to a year before we sent even a battalion of Marines in to guard Danang airfield and a full year before President Johnson responded to Hanoi's actions by dispatching organized US units to join the fight in South Vietnam. You will hear it argued by many, including some who know better, that the injection of North Vietnamese troops into the struggle has been but a response to your government's "escalation." This is simply not true. In fact, it is the precise opposite of the truth. North

Vietnamese troops were put in the struggle not because Hanoi was responding to our involvement but because Hanoi believed that the dispatch of such troops would enable the Communist Party to topple the Saigon Government before that government could become strong enough to resist such an invasion.

### III

With the injection of North Vietnamese troops, and the American troops which came many months later, the struggle entered a phase that lasted from 1965 until the summer of 1967. During this period the Communists did not succeed in toppling the Saigon Government or arresting the process of political evolution among non-Communist Vietnamese nationalists. Instead, despite surface disturbances, the Republic of Vietnam made political progress that in the aggregate was truly remarkable. Furthermore, the Communists lost the strategic military initiative during this period and found themselves beset with mounting problems. As a result, last summer there was yet another review of the bidding in Hanoi and another series of strategic decisions which have moved the struggle into another new phase.

The present upsurge of Communist activity in South Vietnam -- including the "Tet Offensive" -- is the outgrowth of this strategic debate,

which has manifested itself publicly in various important speeches and articles by Communist leaders, most notably Giap's "Big Victory, Great Task" of September 1967 and a June 1967 article published under the pen name of "Truong Son" and written by a North Vietnamese general named Tran Do who until he was killed in the Tet offensive was one of the top commanders of the VC forces in South Vietnam. From such published material, the recall of North Vietnam's ambassadors to Hanoi and other, more sensitive evidence, we can build a general picture of the tone and substance of last summer's discussion and decisions.

The public evidence of this discussion, such as the articles just mentioned, is very confident in tone. The Vietnamese Communists claim to have mastered what they call our "special war" (i. e., a struggle in which we employ American advisors but not American troops) and claim that with continued effort they can cope with our present "limited war." These public documents, however, make it very clear that the Communist Party felt that in order to achieve its political objectives it had to counter our ability to mount search and destroy operations -- i. e., regain the strategic initiative -- and it had to smash the developing pacification program. These documents also make it clear that the Communists intend to pursue their political objectives by exacerbating what they call the "contradictions"



between the Saigon Government and its people, between your government and its Vietnamese allies, and the "contradictions" the Communists see in U.S. political life, i. e., our domestic dissent at the war.

Despite the confident note struck in published articles and speeches, including those designed primarily for internal Party consumption, the principal reason for last summer's discussion was the Communist leadership's mounting concern over what it considered the adverse direction of the basic trends in the Vietnamese struggle.

After the deployment of US ground forces in response to invasion by the North Vietnamese Army, the Communists had lost the strategic initiative. They had not had a significant tactical success in two years. This lack of even tactical success was causing mounting morale problems within their force structure. An insurgent army can absorb reverses but it will collapse if too long denied some sense of forward momentum. Furthermore, allied actions during 1966 and early 1967 shattered the aura of invincibility that had once surrounded Communist military actions and had long been one of the Communists' most potent political weapons. The Hanoi leadership had to recognize that its forces were taking heavy and mounting losses on the field of battle.

Hanoi also had to recognize that the portion of the South Vietnamese population to which the Communist Party had relatively easy access was

steadily shrinking, a fact that came through much more clearly in the pages of captured Communist documents than in the editorial columns of some of our leading newspapers. This shrinking population base posed a fundamental threat to the Party's ability to sustain the pretense that the Vietnam struggle was really a "southern civil war."

Above all, the Communist Party was disturbed by the political evolution that had taken place in South Vietnam in the two years between the summer of 1965 and the summer of 1967, a process whose fundamental significance was much more keenly appreciated by the Hanoi Politburo than by many American journalists and politicians. Despite its problems and weaknesses, the Saigon Government had moved and was moving in a direction the Party could not tolerate. Fragile and fallible as its Vietnamese and foreign critics have claimed it to be, by the summer of 1967 the Republic of Vietnam had a constitution drafted by an elected Assembly chosen in an election in which over half South Vietnam's entire adult population took part. In addition to the national elections which caught the prime attention of the foreign press, the government had also conducted village and hamlet elections of great political significance. Under the terms of their freely drafted constitution, the Vietnamese people were about to choose a president, vice president, and a two chamber legislature in

elections Hanoi knew it was not going to be able to disrupt or prevent. This constitutional and electoral process was far from perfect; but it held positive hope and promise, and it gave the government in Saigon an infinitely better claim to mandate than anything the Communists' puppet "National Liberation Front" could offer. As the South Vietnamese people know far better than many Americans, such political power as the Front may have rises primarily, in Mao Tse Tung's words, out of the barrel of a gun (in these days, more often than not, a Russian or East European manufactured gun, shipped through China and carried by a North Vietnamese soldier).

In these developments, the Communist Party saw not only a fundamental threat to its primary objective of acquiring political control over all of Vietnam, but -- even worse -- disturbing evidence that the Party's strategy was simply not working; for that strategy had been initially adopted to prevent just such developments from occurring. In short, the Communists opted to move along different strategic lines not because our Vietnamese allies' efforts were failing but because (with our support) they were beginning to hold genuine -- and, to Hanoi, deeply disturbing -- promise of success.

In general terms, Hanoi's leaders decided last summer to forego their strategy of protracted war and move swiftly, whatever be the human cost, to collapse the Republic of Vietnam before it became irrevocably too

late to do so. Hanoi decided to gamble, to commit the assets and take the risks involved in an all-out effort to achieve decisive results during 1968.

The main object of Hanoi's new strategy is to reverse the basic trends in the struggle; for the Party Politburo clearly recognized last summer that these trends, if not reversed, spelled eventual Communist defeat. By dint of maximum effort, Hanoi's leaders hope to collapse the Saigon Government both militarily and politically while that government is still developing and before it becomes too strong to overthrow. By collapsing the Saigon Government, Hanoi hopes to destroy the political basis for American participation in the South Vietnamese people's struggle for freedom and to crack America's will to continue supporting that struggle. It is no accident that Hanoi chose the American election year of 1968 as its time of maximum effort. Vietnamese Communist publications and pronouncements demonstrate clearly how closely Hanoi follows the voices of dissent and discord in the United States and how anxious Hanoi is to see American discouragement and discontent over the war mount in a manner politically profitable to the Vietnamese Communist cause.

#### IV

The enemy began the implementation of his new strategy last fall, laying the groundwork for his "winter-spring offensive" by attempting to

divert our interest and attention away from South Vietnam's most heavily populated areas to the thinly populated frontiers. The high casualty toll of the battles of Loc Ninh, Dak To, and other engagements along or near South Vietnam's western and northern borders bear mute testimony to the Communist Party's utter disregard for human life in pursuit of its political and strategic objectives. The sharp buildup of North Vietnamese forces in South Vietnam, including the dispatch of at least two additional divisions of the North Vietnamese Army (the 304th and 320th), was also part of the Party's preparations for an all-out attack, an attack that seems to have been planned by General Giap himself. In the planning and execution of this attack, Hanoi has virtually abandoned all pretense that the struggle is anything other than a North Vietnamese-run war, though both Hanoi's own propaganda and that of its NLF puppets have tried to maintain the myth of an "internal southern struggle" in their pronouncements aimed at foreign audiences.

The major moves of this "winter-spring" campaign were, of course, built around the so-called "Tet Offensive." Beginning on the night of 29 January, Communist troops desecrated the most sacred and traditional of all Vietnamese holidays by mounting coordinated attacks against over 100 civil and military targets throughout South Vietnam.

It is almost impossible for Americans to appreciate the psychological impact of the Communists' picking this moment to strike. Tet, the lunar new year, is our Christmas, New Year's Eve, Easter, and Fourth of July all rolled into one. Every Vietnamese is supposed to return to his family home and give account to his ancestors of his custody of the family name during the preceding year. Normally, Tet is a joyous time of movement in which all public activity ceases as everyone engages in family-oriented rites, festivities, and celebrations. The Communists opted to move at Tet because they had to. To achieve any measure of widespread tactical surprise they had to take advantage of the holiday atmosphere and customary mass movement of people throughout the country in the days just before Tet. The misery and destruction the Communists caused in desecrating this sacred holiday has produced a political revulsion difficult for westerners to comprehend. The Communists' actions have made it clear to the Vietnamese people that the Party will stop at absolutely nothing in its ruthless pursuit of its political objectives.

The ruthless actions of Communist forces in urban areas throughout Vietnam provided a clear foretaste of what future the Vietnamese people could expect if they ever come under Communist rule. When the Communists attacked the towns, their commissars and executioners came in with the first wave of troops.

Much ink has been spilled and many hands wrung over unfortunate extreme actions committed by some of our allies in the heat or pressure of battle. Actions which are morally wrong should be condemned no matter who commits them and no matter what be the circumstances under which they are committed. But the condemnations I have seen or heard or read in this country have been almost entirely directed against the excesses or inadvertent actions of a few people on our side. I have waited in vain for much mention, let alone condemnation of the Communists' widespread, and coldly calculated terrorism, including the deliberate murder of women and children whose only crime was that their husbands or fathers were officials of the Vietnamese Government or members of its armed forces. These were not accidents or excesses committed in the heat of battle. They were deliberate, premeditated political acts carried out by Communist forces throughout South Vietnam in accordance with the traditional Communist employment of terror and wanton murder for purposes of political persuasion.

You all have heard from the press and television about General Loan. How many of you have heard what happened on the night of 31 January when the Communists temporarily overran a South Vietnamese armor command installation at Go Vap near Saigon? I'll tell you what happened: The Viet Cong captured two South Vietnamese armored corps officers and their families, who were also living in the compound. The VC demanded that the two officers join the Communist cause. The officers refused. The VC

dragged the two officers to their quarters and again made the same demands, this time with the officers' families standing by. Again, both officers refused. With each refusal, the VC shot and killed one child right before his father's eyes. When their children were dead, the officers' wives were killed. Then the two officers still refused, both of them were decapitated.

This, my friends, is the enemy our South Vietnamese allies are fighting. Their view of the matter may be found in the words of the commander of this post when he was later asked why his two subordinates had refused to defect. "We have known the enemy for many years," he answered, "it's as simple as that."

V

The Tet attacks marked the beginning, not the end, of a new phase of intensified Communist effort. The precise consequences of these attacks are hard to measure, partly because we have a much more complete picture of the problems and difficulties we and our allies face than we now have of our adversaries' immediate problems and difficulties. Thus, any balance sheet drawn on the basis of information now in hand will inevitably be disproportionately weighted on the negative side. Furthermore, no one can give the final score of a game that is still being played. The Tet offensive was not a one-time action. It was the opening move in a battle



that is far from over, a battle whose outcome will influence the entire course of the Vietnamese struggle.

Even now, however, it is obvious that the Communists failed to attain their maximum objectives. They hoped to paralyze the Saigon Government in one quick series of rabbit punches. In this they failed. The Republic of Vietnam did not collapse. The much criticized South Vietnamese Army rose in the face of adversity to beat off everything the Communists could throw at it. Virtually all of ARVN's units were engaged in the fight. None collapsed and none were overrun. Nowhere were the Communists able to gain even temporary control over a whole city or town. Throughout the land, everywhere the Communists attacked they were met, mastered, and thrown back. The Communists had hoped to persuade or force the populations of at least some major towns and cities to rally to the VC cause. In the early days of February, Hanoi's propaganda and the propaganda of Hanoi's NLF puppets claimed that pro-VC popular political activity was taking place in many of South Vietnam's towns and cities. These claims, of course, were lies. In no town or city did any significant element of the population publicly manifest support for the VC/NLF cause.

In their attempt to collapse the Republic of Vietnam in a single series of blows, the Communists took terrible casualties. General Westmoreland has reported that in the first three months of this year,

Communist forces have had 80,000 of their number killed in action. Some of our press and many of our critics dispute this figure. I do not propose to enter into that dispute here. All I ask you to recognize is that even if that figure were cut in half or cut by three quarters, the indisputable and inescapable fact remains that in the last three months the Communists have lost more troops in combat in South Vietnam than we have lost during the entire period of our involvement. Furthermore, the qualitative impact of Communist losses is probably even greater than their quantitative impact. Those lost included key leaders, organizers, and commanders difficult to replace. They also include highly trained sapper, terrorist and assassination squads, which were quite literally wiped out and will take many months, if not years, to replace with personnel of equal skill. In short, our adversaries not only failed to achieve what they hoped to accomplish, but, in so failing, they paid a terrible price.

The fact that the Communists did not succeed in their initial try has by no means led them to give up the fight. Far from it. We know from prisoners, captured documents, and other sources of information, that the Communists plan to carry on their intensive campaign throughout South Vietnam in the weeks and months ahead. Hanoi is engaged in an all-out effort to collapse the Saigon Government as an effective political instrument. The Communists plan to harry and harass the ARVN, hoping to inflict at

least some defeats and, if possible, induce the surrender or defection of at least some units. Our adversaries also plan to do everything they can to burr away at the GVN's civil components, hoping to intimidate key officials and to compound Saigon's administrative problems by causing misery and dislocation wherever possible. In rural areas temporarily uncovered by the GVN's immediate need to protect towns and cities, the VC are making a maximum effort to recruit and organize, to replenish their losses and undo the work of pacification. All of these actions are carefully orchestrated. They are designed to pose the GVN with more problems than it can handle. Above all, they are designed to create an atmosphere of crisis and fear that will erode the Vietnamese people's confidence in their government's ability to function. At the same time, Communist actions throughout South Vietnam are also aimed at American opinion and carefully designed to make the appearances, if not the realities, of the situation increase our discouragement and distress.

This upsurge of Communist activity and the massive commitment of Communist resources involved therein, has posed our Vietnamese allies with grave threats, problems, and challenges. These problems will be well known to most of you, for they are extensively reported in our press and public media. Indeed, they are so extensively, and often exaggeratedly, reported that it is easy to overlook the fact that our adversaries are not

paragons of perfection, are not invincible, and have many serious problems of their own.

The extensive propaganda claims the Communists have made, including claims made to their own forces, coupled with their lack of real initial political or military success, have made the Communists both psychologically and politically vulnerable to further reversal or failure. Communist forces may now ring many South Vietnamese towns and cities but these forces are operating far from their traditional base and sanctuary areas. They are over-extended, their logistic supply lines are taxed with demands these supply channels were never designed to handle, and these supply lines are being even further crimped by allied air and ground action. The losses the Communists have suffered have taken an inevitable toll on the morale and effectiveness of their forces. In any renewed attacks on cities and towns, Communist troops employed will know that they do not have the element of surprise this time, that they cannot expect the support of the urban population, and that in such attacks, many of them will inevitably die. Even the commissars cannot conceal these brute facts from troops who know what happened to their comrades in the initial Tet assaults. In trying to mount much larger and more coordinated operations than they have ever before attempted, our Communist adversaries have encountered serious command and control problems and in many areas their coordination has been disastrously faulty. The Communists cannot

succeed without an effective maximum effort from every component of their organization. The extent to which they are already over-extended with their secret apparatus now out in the open and their forces exposed, the casualties and losses they need to recoup, their exaggerated claims which have already been given the lie by actual events, and the promises of early victory they have made to their own cadre and troops all combine to make the Communists highly vulnerable to political and military counter attack. In driving for quick victory they have unavoidably incurred the risk of shattering defeat.

Above all, the Vietnamese Communists have a fundamental problem so transparently obvious that many fail to recognize its existence. If it were indeed true, as Communist propaganda stridently asserts, that the bulk of the South Vietnamese people wanted to live under a regime controlled by the Vietnamese Communist Party, or even if it were true that the majority of the South Vietnamese people were passively willing to accept such a regime without draconian coercion, the Vietnam struggle would have long since been over. The fact is, however, that neither the Vietnamese Communists nor their NLF puppets -- whom the Vietnamese people clearly recognize for what they are -- have any significant measure of genuine popular support. Too many Vietnamese are too well aware from first hand experience, the experience of close relatives or the testimony of trusted friends what life under Communist Party rule is like. In the minds

of many Vietnamese, of course, aversion to Communist rule does not translate into positive support for the Saigon government. Translating such aversion into positive support is perhaps our Vietnamese allies' most important political task. But this widespread if often passive aversion is the principal obstacle and it is an obstacle that, so far, has frustrated the Communists' every effort to achieve their ultimate political ambitions.

## VI

In the days and weeks ahead, the Communists clearly intend to continue the harassment of many towns and cities and to maintain as much pressure as they can on our allies' military and political structure. They will almost certainly attempt some renewed series of major attacks. The urgency with which North Vietnam is endeavoring to reinforce its troops in the northern part of South Vietnam makes it clear that we can anticipate an upsurge of military action in I Corps, perhaps at Khe Sanh, now gallantly defended both by our Marines and by South Vietnamese Rangers, whose contribution to Khe Sanh's defense some in this country deliberately ignore. From prisoners and documents, we know Hanoi is particularly anxious to gain political control over South Vietnam's two northernmost provinces -- Quang Tri and Thua Thien. Thus we must expect renewed assaults on Hue and probably Quang Tri city. Elsewhere,

we must expect the enemy to probe incessantly and to attack wherever he thinks the local odds may be favorable. No one can guarantee that in their country-wide maximum effort, our adversaries will not be able to attain some local tactical success. If they do, we can be certain that the Communists will endeavor to convince the world at large that such local success portends the inevitable total collapse of the Saigon government. Communist propaganda will bend every effort to imbue the Vietnamese people and their allies with a sense of despair that could make such claims self-fulfilling.

As it mounts pressure by political agitation and military action in and around South Vietnam, Hanoi will always have available another political card to throw on the table: negotiations. To Hanoi's leaders, negotiations are but another political tactic -- not an end in themselves and not an avenue to the honorable resolution of a common problem. Despite your President and your government's constant and unceasing efforts to find an honorable solution to the struggle in Vietnam, Hanoi has never displayed the slightest interest in any meaningful discussion of the issues involved, let alone any reasonable settlement of them. Hanoi has, however, cynically exploited our unending quest for peace to sow seeds of suspicion in the minds of our Vietnamese allies in an effort to make them doubt our constancy and to generate the fear that we

might sell them out in some private deal arranged behind their backs.

Incredible as it may seem to us, the Communists have planted the rumor throughout South Vietnam that the Americans were silent partners in the Tet offensive and that the offensive was really a Washington - Hanoi plot designed to give America an excuse for withdrawing from Vietnam.

During a period when it is exerting maximum pressure on our Vietnamese allies within South Vietnam, Hanoi is quite capable of making a substantively meaningless but superficially tempting gesture in the negotiation area in the hope that our exploration of that gesture might constitute the final straw of discouragement necessary to collapse our Vietnamese allies' will to carry on the struggle. This is something for which we must be prepared and a tactic by which, if it comes, we must not be deceived. We must never cease our quest for an honorable peace, but at the same time our desire for peace must not be allowed to trick us into disguised surrender.

## VII

In Vietnam, we stand today in the midst of a crucial period of intense struggle. And what, you ask, is the outlook? No one can say for certain, because Vietnam's future is not now irrevocably determined. It will be decided by the wisdom, stamina and courage of many people: people in



Vietnam itself and, to a lesser but still significant extent, people here in the United States. The only thing now really clear is that the situation in Vietnam is never likely to return to the pre-Tet status quo. Too much has happened since then. The Communists have committed too much to their effort to force an early -- and, for them, favorable -- decision. This maximum effort unquestionably poses a grave challenge to our Vietnamese allies. But in that challenge there is also great opportunity. The next few months will probably be critical and could be decisive. The Communists have gambled a great deal on their ability to collapse the Saigon Government in a short span of time. If this gamble succeeds, Hanoi will have taken a long step towards the achievement of its ultimate objective. If this gamble fails, however, our allies will have passed a major milestone on their road to independent existence as a free nation.

In the critical weeks ahead, the main contribution we in the United States can provide to the struggle will be much more in the moral than in the material realm. Our enemies would naturally like to know exactly what we intend to provide in the way of material support and I am not going to tell them here tonight. I do want to emphasize to you, however, that the image this country projects of willingness -- or unwillingness -- to stay the course and meet the challenge will have a profound influence on the behavior of our Vietnamese allies and their Communist adversaries.

The primary burden of coping with the enemy's immediate thrust must perforce fall on the shoulders of our Vietnamese allies, backed up by the American military and civilian personnel already in Vietnam. We can neither ask nor should we expect perfection from our allies. We must recognize that they not only have to fight a war for survival but at the same time must cope with fundamental social, political and economic problems that have deep historical roots and are not susceptible to quick or easy solution. The Communists have the simple task. All they want or now need to do is wreck and destroy. The leaders of the Republic of Vietnam are faced with the awesome challenge of building a nation and simultaneously defending it from savage externally directed attack.

Considering the dimensions of their challenge, our Vietnamese allies' performance has been truly remarkable. In the savage ferocity of recent Communist attacks, their will and spirit never faltered. The fledgling institutions of constitutional democracy vindicated the hope placed in them and fulfilled their promise. Non-Communist nationalists of all political persuasions, including many opposed to the present Saigon Government, have banded together in the clear face of common danger. The South Vietnamese Army fought everywhere it was attacked: bravely, well and successfully. In the aftermath of the initial onslaught, the Saigon Government has moved effectively not only to defend its people but also

to address itself to some of their basic problems and grievances. Certainly, there are dangers. Certainly, there are problems. Certainly, there have been shortfalls in individual performance. Over-all, however, the steps our brave allies have taken to meet the crisis, to defend their towns and cities, to cope with the human misery engendered by the Communist attacks, and to rise to all the manifold demands of the immediate situation are heartening, encouraging, and more than deserving of our wholehearted support.

In the final analysis, only the Vietnamese themselves can create a viable and independent South Vietnamese state. This is a task in which we can only assist, partly by material support and primarily by aiding in the defense against external or externally directed aggression. Although our Vietnamese allies have never been faced with graver threats, they have never had greater opportunities. In weathering this crisis, they can prove to themselves, their people and the world that they can take everything the Hanoi aggressors are capable of throwing against them. By doing so, they can deal those aggressors a shattering blow and move swiftly forward in the work of building a free nation. In doing this, our allies can provide the only evidence ever really likely to sway Hanoi's judgment or convince the Communist Party leadership that its attempt to dictate South Vietnam's future by force of arms is foredoomed to failure. If our allies' response to Hanoi's savage onslaught forces Hanoi to change its strategy and pursue

its objectives by peaceful political competition rather than armed struggle, they will have made a major contribution not only to the welfare of their own people but of us all.